BIG PHARMA WATCH

Pfizer's Latest 'Dear Scientist' Video Stars Long COVID Patient Looking for Answers + More

The Defender's Big Pharma Watch delivers the latest headlines related to pharmaceutical companies and their products, including vaccines, drugs, medical devices and treatments. The views expressed in the below excerpts from other news sources do not necessarily reflect the views of The Defender. Our goal is to provide readers with breaking news that affects human health and the environment.

By The Defender Staff

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Pfizer's Latest 'Dear Scientist' Video Stars a Long COVID Patient Looking for Answers

Fierce Pharma reported:

To date, there are no FDA-approved treatments for long COVID, and researchers are still working to better understand the disease — especially since it can present with any of more than 200 symptoms — both of which are key plot points in the latest installment of Pfizer's long-running "Dear Scientist" series.

Each entry in the content campaign, a collaboration with the Boston Globe's BG Brandlab, centers on an individual who's written a letter to scientists asking for more information about a specific disease and what researchers are doing to help. The newest episode spotlights Tammy Wilshire, who was first infected with COVID in March 2020 and has been experiencing additional symptoms ever since.

In a statement sent to Fierce Pharma Marketing, a spokesperson for Pfizer said, "We believe COVID-19 will be with us for some time, if not indefinitely. As we've established, we intend to provide significant medical contributions across the COVID-19 disease spectrum, from prevention with vaccines to therapeutics that help patients avoid or address severe outcomes of disease."

"Though we do not currently have any Pfizer-sponsored long COVID studies underway, we are continuing to review data from our clinical studies and real-world evidence," the statement continued. "Scientific understanding of long COVID is both nascent and rapidly evolving. We are collaborating on multiple investigator-sponsored studies to evaluate PAXLOVID's potential use in patients with long COVID. By investing in this collaborative approach, we aim to help accelerate and streamline research efforts that can advance our collective knowledge about long COVID."

Low-Carb Diets Work. Why Does the American Diabetes Association Push Insulin Instead?

The Guardian reported:

For a glimpse into how big business influences the $4 trillion U.S. healthcare system, look no further than the world's most powerful diabetes advocacy and research non-profit, the American Diabetes Association (ADA).

Diabetes afflicts 38 million Americans, with another 90 million considered pre-diabetic. Every year the disease claims the lives of over 100,000 Americans and disproportionately affects people of color. It is also ruinously expensive, as doctor visits, hospital stays, insulin, blood test strips, leg amputations, continuous glucose monitors and numerous glucose-lowering drugs add up to about $400 billion a year. To put it bluntly, we are losing the war on diabetes.

And unlike many other diseases — such as certain cancers, Alzheimer's, kidney disease, or COVID — type 2 diabetes is reversible.

This bears repeating and elaboration. Numerous nutritional studies have shown that diabetes can be reversed through a strict diet low in carbohydrates, the macronutrient that people with diabetes cannot metabolize without the help of drugs. The ADA concedes this — but you wouldn't necessarily know it from the drug pharmaceutical companies and recipes that the organization recommends to people suffering from the condition.

'Kids Need to Breathe Just Like Adults Do': $35 Price Caps Don't Apply to Asthma Meds Young Children Need, Doctors Say

CNN Health reported:

Kerry Pearl remembers the pharmacist holding up the medicine her 4-year-old son needed to help him breathe. "He was literally holding it, looking at me like: 'I can't give you this,'" she recalls. "My poor kid is at home not stopping coughing the night and waking up coughing, and you're holding the answer and the insurance company kind of holds the keys here."

It was the asthma drug fluticasone, whose brand name is Flovent. It's often used daily by the youngest children with asthma as a preventive medicine so their airways don't get so swollen that a trigger — a virus, cold air, pollen — could cause an asthma attack.

The maker of Flovent, British drug giant GSK, removed the branded drug from the U.S. market in January, and its replacement — an authorized generic form identical in all but branding — doesn't have the same insurance coverage. It costs hundreds of dollars a month without it. The move has left families like Pearl's scrambling.

Asthma drugs can be pricy across the board, so much so that the Senate health committee, led by Sen. Bernie Sanders, opened an investigation into the situation in January. Shortly afterward, three of the biggest makers of asthma inhalers, including GSK, pledged to cap out-of-pocket costs for some U.S. patients at $35.

The problem, doctors and parents told CNN, is those pledges don't apply to daily inhalers used by the youngest kids with asthma.

Universities Are Profiting From Blocking Drug–Price Reform

Jacobin reported:

Research universities, many of them public, have joined forces with pharmaceutical companies and Wall Street firms to fight any government efforts to curtail out-of-control drug prices, saying the regulations could stifle innovation.

But these universities are also likely concerned that drug-price reforms would hamper their profits. Case in point: the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) has quietly reaped more than a billion dollars in payouts from Xtandi, a lifesaving cancer drug that it developed with the help of government funding and now costs U.S. patients $200,000 a year.

The university is among those working to block the government from lowering the cost of prescription drugs like Xtandi which have been developed with taxpayer money.

Since this first-of-its-kind prostate cancer drug was approved for use in 2012, UCLA has received $1.6 billion in royalty fees, patent income, and reimbursement payments thanks to its development of Xtandi, according to information obtained through the California Public Records Act by the Lever.

Antipsychotics May Do Great Harm to People With Dementia: Report

U.S. News & World Report reported:

Antipsychotics can substantially increase dementia patients' risk of many serious health problems, a new study warns. Dementia patients prescribed antipsychotics have an increased risk of stroke, blood clots, heart attack, heart failure, bone fractures, pneumonia and kidney damage, researchers reported April 17 in the BMJ.

"A move away from the overprescription of antipsychotics is overdue," concluded the research team led by Pearl Mok, a research fellow at the University of Manchester in England.

The study adds impetus to an ongoing investigation by the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services into the overuse of antipsychotic drugs in nursing homes.

The most commonly prescribed antipsychotics were risperidone, quetiapine, haloperidol, and olanzapine, researchers said. Together, these accounted for almost 80% of all prescriptions.

The Path to a Better Tuberculosis Vaccine Runs Through Montana

KFF Health News reported:

A team of Montana researchers is playing a key role in the development of a more effective vaccine against tuberculosis, an infectious disease that has killed more people than any other. The BCG (Bacillus Calmette-Guérin) vaccine, created in 1921, remains the sole TB vaccine.

While it is 40% to 80% effective in young children, its efficacy is very low in adolescents and adults, leading to a worldwide push to create a more powerful vaccine.

One effort is underway at the University of Montana Center for Translational Medicine. The center specializes in improving and creating vaccines by adding what are called novel adjuvants. An adjuvant is a substance included in the vaccine, such as fat molecules or aluminum salts, that enhances the immune response, and novel adjuvants are those that have not yet been used in humans. Scientists are finding that adjuvants make for stronger, more precise, and more durable immunity than antigens, which create antibodies, alone.

In mid-March, the Bill & Melinda Gates Medical Research Institute announced it had begun the third and final phase of clinical trials for the new vaccine in seven countries. The trials should take about five years to complete. Research and production are being done in several places, including at a manufacturing facility in Hamilton owned by GSK, a giant pharmaceutical company.

Africa CDC Blasts Moderna After It Halts Plans to Build Vaccine Plant in Kenya

Fierce Pharma reported:

The Africa CDC responded to Moderna's plans to step back from building a mRNA vaccine manufacturing facility in Kenya, saying the move by the Spikevax maker only "perpetuates" the inadequate response to the COVID-19 pandemic on the continent.

Last week, Moderna announced it was reevaluating its decision to build a $500 million plant because it hasn't received any vaccine orders from the continent since 2022. The drugmaker grabbed global headlines in 2021 when it said it was looking to build a manufacturing site on the continent.

Spikevax earned Moderna $17.7 billion in sales in 2021 and $18.4 billion in 2022. However, as the pandemic began to wane and vaccine demand subsided in 2023, the company reported $6.7 billion in sales last year.

During the pandemic, the African Vaccine Acquisition Trust acquired 400 million vaccines from drugmakers other than Moderna because its vaccines weren't made available despite attempts to buy from the company, according to the Africa CDC.

After Coming Up Short in COVID, Valneva Focuses on Chikungunya Vaccine Launch

Fierce Pharma reported:

After striking out in an attempt to create a niche for its COVID-19 vaccine, Valneva is taking its swings at what it does best — developing, manufacturing and commercializing vaccines for a variety of infectious diseases with unmet needs.

Previously at the top of the French company's priority list was advancing shots that can defend against Lyme disease and the Zika virus. And now, most importantly for Valneva, is the launch of its new vaccine for the chikungunya virus.

The shot, which was endorsed by the FDA in November of last year and recommended for use by the CDC in February, is the first vaccine for the virus, which is carried by mosquitos in tropical areas of the world and can cause debilitating muscle pain, with its effects lingering for years in some who have been infected.

Valneva has guided its annual chikungunya sales to exceed 100 million euros ($107 million) within three years of launch, which is an exciting prospect for a company whose total product revenue totaled 145 million euros ($157 million) last year. Additionally, Valneva expects the travel market opportunity for chikungunya vaccines to be substantial, with between 300 million euros ($320 million) and 400 million euros ($427 million).

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